

The Analysis of Reflection and Leibniz's Early Response to Spinoza

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1. Introduction

In a famous passage from the *Notes on Spinoza's Ethics* [1678 (?)], Leibniz comments on Spinoza's claim that if the object of the idea that constitutes the human mind is the body, all that happens in the body is perceived by the mind (*Ethics* 2p12):

Ideas do not act. The mind acts. The whole world in fact is the object of each mind, and the whole world somehow is perceived by each mind. The world is one, and yet minds are diverse. The mind therefore does not come into being through the idea of the body, but because God sees the world in various ways, such as I a town¹.

Moreover, in a comment to Spinoza's view that the object of the idea that constitutes the human mind is nothing but the body, or an actually existing mode of extension (*Ethics* 2p13), Leibniz argues, "from this it would follow that each mind is only momentarily in the same human being"². Already in *On the Origin of Things From Forms* [April 1676 (?)], Leibniz objects: "Is the mind the idea of the body? That cannot be, for the mind remains when the body has been

1 A VI, 4, 1713. Except where otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

2 A VI, 4, 1714.

continually changed”³. These remarks are puzzling in two respects. First, they seem completely to miss the point. Spinoza clearly thinks that minds are active (*Ethics* 3p1; 3p3), and that minds endure not only over time but also over an indefinitely long duration (*Ethics* 3p9; 5p31s). It is tempting to conclude that Leibniz fails to distinguish his views from those of Spinoza in any substantive way⁴. Second, Leibniz’s remarks do not seem to fit well into the development of his own early metaphysics. In several writings of the late 1660s, and also in those from the mid-1670s, Leibniz endorses a Neo-platonic emanation scheme that comes close to Spinoza’s view of the relation between God’s ideas and things in the world⁵. Seen from the perspective of these writings, Leibniz’s comments on Spinoza’s theory of mind seem to be in tension with the persisting influence of his own version of a Neo-platonic substance monism.

These impressions are misleading, however, as the present paper argues. In his reading notes on the *Ethics*, Leibniz has a conception

3 A VI, 3, 518; translated in *G. W. Leibniz: De Summa Rerum. Metaphysical Papers, 1675-1676* (= *The Yale Leibniz*), ed. and trans. by G. H. R. Parkinson, Hew Haven – London 1992 (hereafter PDSR), p. 75.

4 I owe this way of putting the point to Tim Crockett.

5 R. M. Adams: *Leibniz. Determinist, Idealist, Theist*, New York 1994, pp. 130-131; M. Kulstad: “Did Leibniz incline towards Monistic Pantheism in 1676?”, in: *Leibniz und Europa. VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress, Vorträge I. Teil*, 1994, pp. 424-428; M. Kulstad: “Leibniz’s *De Summa Rerum*: the Origin of the Variety of Things”, in: D. Berlioz and F. Nef (eds.): *L’actualité de Leibniz: les deux labyrinths* (= *Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa XXXIV*), Stuttgart 1999, pp. 69-85; C. Wilson: “Atoms, Minds and Vortices in *De Summa Rerum*: Leibniz vis-à-vis Hobbes and Spinoza”, in: S. Brown (ed.): *The Young Leibniz and his Philosophy (1646-1676)*, Dordrecht 1999, pp. 223-243, especially pp. 224-228; M. Kulstad: “Pantheism, Harmony, Unity and Multiplicity: A Radical Suggestion of Leibniz’s *De Summa Rerum*”, in: A. Lamarra and R. Palaia (eds.): *Unità e molteplicità nel pensiero filosofico e scientifico di Leibniz*, Lessico Intellettuale Europeo, vol. LXXXIV, Florence 2000, pp. 97-105.

of the activity and persistence of the mind that differs considerably from Spinoza's. So, too, for the ontology of the late 1660s and mid-1670s: here Leibniz's views on the nature of the activity and persistence of minds amount to a significant modification of substance monism. Leibniz's ideas about mental activity and persistence are a consequence of an analysis of reflection that contrasts markedly with the theory of ideas of ideas set forth in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Whereas Spinoza tries to develop an analysis that sees reflection as a phenomenon that is synchronic with the mental activity that is the object of reflection, Leibniz argues for an analysis that sees a diachronic structure as an irreducible feature of reflection. Whereas Spinoza's account of reflection does not ascribe to reflection an additional causal role over and above that of the mental activity that is the object of reflection, Leibniz's account ascribes to acts of reflection an additional causal role. The differences in their respective theories of reflection make Leibniz's response a marked departure from Spinoza's theory of mind.

2. Substance Monism and Substance Pluralism, 1668-1672

The issue of substance monism enters into Leibniz's metaphysics at an early stage through his adaptation of a broadly Neo-platonic theory of the relation between God and created substances. As Catherine Wilson and Christia Mercer have pointed out⁶, a version of a Neo-platonic emanation theory according to which objects in the world are the results of ideas in the Divine mind can already be

⁶ Wilson: "Atoms, Minds and Vortices in *De Summa Rerum*" (see note 5), p. 227; C. Mercer: "God as Both the Unity and Multiplicity in the World", in: Lamarra and Palaia (eds.): *Unità e molteplicità nel pensiero filosofico e scientifico di Leibniz* (see note 5) pp. 71-95, especially p. 87. See also C. Mercer: *Leibniz's Metaphysics. Its Origins and Development*, New York 2001, ch. 3 and 4.

found in *On Transubstantiation* [1668-1669 (?)]. For example, Leibniz writes there that “[I]n an idea there is ideally contained both active and passive potency, the active and passive intellect. Insofar as the passive intellect concurs, there is matter in the idea; insofar as the active intellect [concur], form”⁷. Moreover, in a marginal note to an earlier passage in the text Leibniz remarks:

The unions of the mind and the body are ideas, in the same way as angles are unions of a point with lines. Ideas are identical with the forms of substantial things. Ideas are in God in the same way as all action is in the agent, and as the creation is in God. If someone should ask: is an idea created or not? One has to respond: is a creature created or not?⁸

This may suggest that Leibniz intends quite generally to equate substantial forms and Divine ideas. In fact, in contemporary *Notes* [1668 (?)] Leibniz writes that the “substance of things is the idea” and that the ideas of God and the substances of things are “the same in fact, different in relation; they are, moreover, as action and passion. [...] The substances of things are the act of God on species”⁹. Here, it looks as if the diversity of things in the world is explained through different actions of God on ideas. In this case, the substances of things would be reduced to modifications of the Divine mind.

However, in *On Transubstantiation* there is also a strand of thought that implies a version of substance pluralism, and that modifies Leibniz’s early views on the nature of substance monism. A combination of substance monism and substance pluralism is expressed in the following passage:

7 A VI, 1, 512.

8 A VI, 1, 510.

9 A VI, 1, 513.

It is to be demonstrated through the consensus of philosophers that the substance of a thing does not fall under the senses. Therefore, another concept of mind is required than the one usurped today by sense, otherwise it would fall under the senses. The substance of each thing is not so much the mind as the idea of a concurrent mind. In God there are infinite ideas that are really diverse, and nevertheless God is indivisible. The ideas of God are the substance of things but yet not the essence of things. The idea of God is not the substance of things that are moved by a mind¹⁰.

Here, Leibniz apparently distinguishes the case in which ideas of God constitute the substance of things and the case in which they do not. More precisely, the ideas of God do not constitute the substance of things in case things have a principle of motion in a mind other than the mind of God. This corresponds closely to the way Leibniz uses the notion of substance in the initial stages of his proof for the possibility of the Eucharist. He starts this proof with a two-step definition of the notion of substance which combines the idea that a substance is a “per se subsisting being” with the idea that a per se subsisting being is a being “that has the principle of action within itself.” Using this explication of the notion of substance, Leibniz’s argument proceeds as follows:

Whatever has a principle of action in itself, if it is a body, it has a principle of motion in it. [...]

No body, deprived of a concurrent mind, has a principle of motion in itself. [...]

Thus, no body considered as deprived of a concurrent mind, is a substance.

Whatever is not a substance is an *accident or species*. [...]

Whatever if considered with a concurrent mind is a substance, if deprived of a mind is an accident. A substance is the union with

¹⁰ A VI, 1, 512.

a mind. Thus, the substance of the human body is the union with the human mind; the substance of bodies lacking reason is the union with the universal mind or God; an idea is the union of God with a creature¹¹.

In Leibniz's view there are two ways in which a body can have substantiality: either through the union with the mind of God as a universal principle of motion, or through the unions with a human mind as the principle of motion of an organic body. Leibniz's strategy, therefore, is deliberately conciliatory: his aim is to combine a version of substance monism with a version of substance pluralism. This conciliatory attitude is expressed in the above cited passage about the consensus of philosophers about the inaccessibility of substance to sense perception. The same attitude is also articulated in a passage that in the manuscript has two lacunae (marked by "....."):

Our philosophical views diverge by no means from received philosophy. Even for Aristotle, nature is the principle of motion and rest. But for him, substantial form is properly nature. Therefore, also Averroes and Angelus Mercenarius and Jac. Zabarella claim that substantial form is the principle of individuation. [...] What more? Plato himself propagates in the *Timaeus* a world soul, Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* and the *Physics* an all-pervading active intellect, the Stoics claim that God is the substance of the world, Averroes propagates Aristotle's intellect, Fracastorius and Fernel an origin of forms All this, I think, is explicated in a way that, I have no doubt, through the careful reading of the recent philosophers is accessible to proof¹².

11 A VI, 1, 508-509.

12 A VI, 1, 510.

Even if the lacunae make it difficult to reconstruct the exact wording of an important part of this passage, Leibniz's intention here seems to be to situate the analysis of the relation between the Divine ideas and individual substances in the framework of a program of conciliation. In particular, this program has the purpose to combine elements from various theories of a universal active principle with elements from various theories of a plurality of particular active principles. Moreover, this combination is characterised as being not only compatible with but also accessible to proof from the point of view of the philosophy of the "moderns".

Some hints at how Leibniz thought this program could be realised can be gained from the contemporary *Outline of the Catholic Demonstrations* [1668-1669 (?)]. Clearly, Leibniz there accepts a Neo-platonic emanation theory of creation. For example, the envisaged topic of chapter 14 of the third part is characterized as "the origin of the first human mind explicated through a particle taken from the divine aura"¹³. Nevertheless, this view of creation is compatible with the view that human minds are true principles of action. This becomes clear, when Leibniz outlines the plan for several chapters of the second part, which would contain a "proof of the immortality and incorporeal nature of the soul". The first chapter would prove the immortality "from the immediate sense of thought", the second chapter "from the infinite repeatability of reflection, such that all sensation is an enduring reaction, cf. Hobbes, but this does not take place in bodies", the third chapter "from the wonderful connectedness of dreams". Leibniz also adds as a plan for the fifth chapter a proof "from self-motion, following Plato", and as a plan for the sixth, the proof(s) developed in Kenelm Digby's *Two Treatises*¹⁴.

13 A VI, 1, 496.

14 A VI, 1, 494-495.

Although minds, then, in some sense are seen as emanations of the Divine mind, Leibniz nevertheless has the plan to develop an analysis of the nature of created minds that understands them as principles of action. Moreover, it is this analysis of the mind as a principle of action that in the eyes of Leibniz provides one of the clues of how to combine insights from ancient philosophers with those from the moderns.

In the *Theory of Abstract Motion* [winter 1670-1671 (?)], Leibniz connects these still quite loose threads of thought into a coherent account of the distinction between the mind and physical objects based on the diachronic aspects of sensation, memory, and reflection:

No striving without motion endures longer than a moment except in minds. Because what the striving is in a moment, this is in time the motion of the body: this opens the door to the search for a true distinction between the mind and the body, which up to now no one has explained. Each body is namely a momentary mind, or one that lacks *memory*, because it does not retain for more than a moment its own striving and an alien one contrary to it (two factors, action and reaction, or the comparison and therefore *harmony*, are required for *sense*, and – without which there is no sense – for *lust* or pain): therefore it lacks memory, it lacks the sense of its own actions and passions, it lacks thought¹⁵.

In *On Striving and Motion, Sense and Thinking* [spring-autumn 1671 (?)], this leads Leibniz to an analysis of thought as an action of the mind on itself:

Thought is nothing but the sense of comparison, or shorter, the sense of many at once or the one in many.

It is necessary that in the contents of thought themselves there is the reason of why they are sensed, that is why they exist, and this is not in the thought of single contents, therefore it is in

15 § 17; A VI, 2, 266.

many. Therefore in all. Therefore in the mind, that is in the one in many. [...]

Thinking is being the reason of change, or changing itself. Which is the same as being the reason of itself. *Thinking* is indefinable, as with *sensing*, or rather *acting*. And nevertheless, once assumed they are reflected in themselves. Because *we think*, we know that we are ourselves, because *we act*, [we know] that there is something else. *Being* is all requisites being sensed. A *requisite* is that which if it is not thought something else cannot be thought. [...]

To think *something* is to think thought. To think a *being*, is to think a rational, harmonic, compatible sense¹⁶.

Leibniz there concludes: “Therefore the retention of all strivings, and more precisely the comparison between them, i.e. between all its states – this constitutes the nature of the mind”¹⁷. Similarly, in the sixth manuscript of the *Elements of Natural Law* [second half of 1671 (?)], he defines striving as “the beginning of action” and thought as “action on itself”, and explains the latter definition as follows:

Whatever acts on itself, has some memory (for we *remember* when we sense that we have sensed); and consequently the perception of harmony or disharmony or of lust or pain, through the comparison of an old and a new sensory impression, and also an opinion or an expectation derived from this of a future sensory impression and from this again the conatus to act, i.e., the will¹⁸.

This conception of thought as action of the mind on itself plays an important role in Leibniz’s early views on the nature of substance.

16 A VI, 2, 282-283.

17 A VI, 2, 285.

18 A VI, 1, 483.

Already in the sixth MS of the *Elements of Natural Law*, Leibniz concludes that “[a]ction belongs to that subject, the change of which is the cause of change”¹⁹. This notion of a subject of action based on an analysis of the structure of thought amounts not so much to abolishing substance monism, but rather to a successive qualification of substance monism by means of a version of substance pluralism. Recall the two characterizations of the notion of substance at the beginning of *On Transubstantiation*: there, Leibniz attempted to combine the notion of substance as a *per se* subsisting being with the notion of substance as a being that has a principle of action within itself. Separating these two notions allows Leibniz to maintain a version of substance monism and version of substance pluralism at the same time. Understood in terms of independent existence, only God can be said to be a substance, whereas all creatures depending in their existence on God have the status of modifications of the Divine substance. However, understood in terms of immanent activity, not only the Divine mind but also created minds are substances. Moreover, not only created minds but also composite entities constituted by an organic body and a mind as the principle of its motion can be seen as substances. Thus, already before his Paris years the notion of immanent action leads Leibniz to qualify his version of substance monism by means of a version of substance pluralism. In particular, it is the diachronic analysis of reflection as an immanent action of the mind on its own states that qualifies minds for inclusion in the plurality of substances, and that is the foundation for regarding composite entities with a mind and an organic body as substances distinct from the Divine substance.

19 A VI, 1, 483.

3. The Analysis of Reflection and the Ontology of the *De Summa Rerum*

A similar qualification of substance monism by a version of substance pluralism can be found in the papers of the *De Summa Rerum*. In *That a Perfect Being is Possible*, Leibniz explicates substance monism in terms of a notion of substance as an independent being:

It can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances, i.e. radically, but as modes. This can be demonstrated from the fact that, of those things which are radically distinct, one can be perfectly understood without another; that is, all the requisites of the one can be understood without all the requisites of the other being understood²⁰.

This can plausibly be read not only as a statement about a possible line of defence for substance monism but also as an implicit endorsement of this view. This would fit well with two other statements which, as Ursula Goldenbaum and Mark Kulstad have argued²¹, may well be a response to a problem repeatedly raised in Tschirnhaus' correspondence with Spinoza: how can the single Divine attribute of extension possibly suffice to explain the variety of

20 A VI, 3, 573; PDSR 95.

21 U. Goldenbaum: ““Qui ex conceptu Extensionis secundum tuas meditationes varietas rerum a priori possit ostendi?” Noch einmal zu Leibniz, Spinoza und Tschirnhaus”, in: *Leibniz und Europa, VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress, Vorträge I. Teil* (see note 5), pp. 266-275, especially pp. 267-268; M. Kulstad: “Leibniz, Spinoza, and Tschirnhaus. Metaphysics à Trois, 1675-1676”, in: O. Koistinen and J. Biro (eds.): *Spinoza. Metaphysical Themes*, Oxford 2002, pp. 221-240.

modifications in the material world?²² In *On Forms, or, the Attributes of God*, Leibniz writes that “change and matter, i.e., modifications, are what result from all other forms taken together”²³. And in *On Simple Forms* he says that “when all other attributes are related to any attribute, there result modifications in that attribute”²⁴. As Mark Kulstad has suggested, this amounts to the view that the variety of things cannot result from a Divine attribute considered alone, but from all Divine attributes together²⁵. In spite of this change in the ontology of Divine attributes, this would amount to a view of the nature of created objects that still comes close to Spinoza’s version of substance monism.

However, Leibniz qualifies his view of the origin of things even beyond invoking the combination of a multiplicity of Divine attributes. In a passage from *On the Origin of Things from Forms*, he uses the analogy of the relation of God to space in order to elucidate the sense in which the ideas in the mind of God are not a part of our mind²⁶:

Just as space is to the immeasurable, so is the collection of all minds to the active intellect. [...] God is not a part of our mind, just as the immeasurable is not a part of some place or interval. [...] Just as there is already a shape in the immeasurable before

22 See Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, 5 January 1675; Spinoza: *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt, 4 vols., Heidelberg 1925 (reprint in 5 vols. Heidelberg 1972-1987), vol. 4, p. 268; Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, 2 May 1676; Spinoza: *Opera*, vol. 4, p. 331; Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, 23 June 1676; Spinoza: *Opera*, vol. 4, p. 333.

23 A VI, 3, 522; PDSR 83.

24 A VI, 3, 514; PDSR 71.

25 Kulstad: “Leibniz, Spinoza, and Tschirnhaus” (see note 21), pp. 222-226.

26 For the ontological implications of Leibniz’s early theory of ideas, see A. Blank: “Leibniz’s *De Summa Rerum* and the Panlogistic Interpretation of the Theory of Simple Substances”, in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003), pp. 261-269.

it is marked out, so there is already an idea, i.e. a difference of thoughts, in the primary intelligence. Just as a shape is in space, so is an idea in our mind²⁷.

This may be seen as a response to the way Leibniz understood an aspect of the *Ethics* after his conversations with Tschirnhaus. In *On the Ethics of B. de S.* Leibniz notes: “The mind, according to him [Spinoza], is in a certain way a part of God”²⁸. Of course, it is far from obvious that this adequately captures the views of Spinoza, and it may be problematic to use the claim that God is not a part of our mind as a response to the claim that the mind is a part of God. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the appeal of the analogy between God’s relation to place and space and God’s relation to ideas and minds in *On the Origin of Things from Forms*. A little earlier in the text, Leibniz discusses a similar analogy that suggests that the relationship between absolute extension and place is only in a qualified way a relationship between subject and modification:

Our mind differs from God as absolute extension, which is a maximum and is indivisible, differs from space or place; or as that which is extended *per se* differs from place. [...] [P]lace is not itself a part of it [that which is extended *per se*] but is a modification of it, as a result of the addition of matter; or, it is something that results from the basis of space and from matter²⁹.

This passage differs in an illuminating way from a slightly earlier fragment, dated 18 March 1676, where Leibniz writes that “space is only a consequence of this [the immeasurability of God], as

27 A VI, 3, 520-521; PDSR 79-81.

28 A VI, 3, 384.

29 A VI, 3, 519-520; PDSR 77.

a property is a consequence of essence”³⁰. In the newer version what in the end results from the Divine immeasurability is no longer seen *only* as a result of the Divine essence; rather a factor of particularity, in this case matter, has been added. This points to the conclusion that in the case of the mind some analogous factor for particularity is at work. A similar view is expressed in a passage from *On Simple Forms*:

Things are not produced by the mere combination of forms in God, but along with a subject also. The subject itself, or God, together with his ubiquity, gives the immeasurable, and this immeasurable combined with other subjects brings it about that all possible modes, or things, follow in it. The various results of forms, combined with a subject, bring it about that particulars result³¹.

It is true that here, as in the passage cited before, Leibniz still refers to things as modes. Nevertheless, the second sentence suggests that in addition to the Divine subject and the combination of forms there has to be a plurality of “subjects” that enters into the constitution of things. Moreover, this makes it implausible to understand “subject” in the first and the third sentence as referring to the Divine subject.

Of course, this still is a disconcertingly abstract account of the origin of things, because the nature of the “subjects” mentioned is completely left open. However, there is a strand of thought in the *De Summa Rerum* that – at least with respect to the nature of minds – fills out the sense in which there is a plurality of “subjects”. As in the writings from the years of the *Theory of Abstract Motion*, this strand of thought is directly connected with the analysis of reflection: the

30 A VI, 3, 391-392; PDSR 43.

31 A VI, 3, 523; PDSR 85.

notions of internal activity and persistence over time based on an analysis of reflection make the notion of a “subject” more concrete. In *On the Union of the Soul and the Body*, Leibniz points out that “we do not act as a simple machine, but out of reflection, i.e., of action on ourselves”³². According to *On Memory and the Reflection of the Mind on Itself*, the perception of perceptions is what constitutes the *per se* existence of a mind and the necessity of its continuation.³³ In *On Existence*, one of the last papers of his Paris years, he puts the point thus: “Thought, or the sensation of oneself, or action on oneself, is necessarily continued”³⁴. A slightly earlier paper, *On Forms or Attributes of God*, introduces this explicitly as a criterion for substantiality: “Thought is not duration, but that which thinks is something that endures. And this is the difference between substance and forms”³⁵. Interestingly, Leibniz does not see this criterion of substantiality as something that *contradicts* his version of substance monism. For example, in *On Truth, the Mind, God, and the Universe*, he writes that “something remains in the modifications not as extension itself in space, but as something particular, endowed with certain modifications, namely which perceives this and that”³⁶. In the same text, he connects the view of a plurality of particular things with the analysis of reflection:

In our mind there is a perception or sense of itself, as of a certain particular thing. This is always in us, for as often as we use a word, we recognize that immediately. As often as we wish, we recognize that we perceive our thoughts; that is, we recognize that we thought a short time ago. Therefore intellectual memory consists in this: not *what* we have

32 A VI, 3, 480; PDSR 37.

33 A VI, 3, 517; PDSR 75.

34 A VI, 3, 588; PDSR 113.

35 A VI, 3, 514; PDSR 69.

36 A VI, 3, 509; PDSR 61.

perceived, but *that* we have perceived – that we are those who have sensed. And this is what we commonly call “the same”, this faculty in us which is independent of external things³⁷.

In the sense of a “res agens”, minds are for Leibniz both what is enduring in the modifications of the Divine substance, and what itself is the bearer of modifications. Substance monism and substance pluralism, therefore, are seen as compatible theoretical options because the concepts of substance at work are different: substance as what is causally independent in the case of substance monism, and substance as what is characterized by immanent activity in the case of substance pluralism. In the second sense, there is a plurality of substances in the ontology of the *De Summa Rerum*³⁸.

4. Spinoza’s Synchronic Analysis of Reflection

In the years preceding the *Notes on Spinoza’s Ethics* there has been a significant development in Leibniz’s views on substance monism. Although from the late 1660s to the late 1670s, Leibniz embraces a version of a Neoplatonic emanation scheme, at the same time he modifies this scheme in consequence of a diachronic analysis of reflection. Leibniz’s explicit (and possibly implicit) critique of aspects of Spinoza’s version of substance monism in the *De Summa Rerum* can be seen in the context of this framework. Moreover, even if the subsequent *Notes on Spinoza’s Ethics* are exceedingly short

37 A VI, 3, 509; PDSR 59-61.

38 For the relation of this strategy to Descartes’ view that there is no way of predicating “substance” in an unequivocal way of God and of created beings, see A. Blank: “Substance Monism and Substance Pluralism in Leibniz’s Metaphysical Papers 1675-1676”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 33 (2001), pp. 216-223.

there is a considerable theoretical background behind them. This becomes particularly clear in Leibniz's comments on the passages of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza develops his own analysis of reflection (2p20 to 2p23).

According to *Ethics* 2p20, there is "in God an idea, or knowledge, of the human Mind, which follows in God in the same way and is related to God in the same way as the idea, or knowledge, of the human Body". This in turn, in 2p20d, is described as a consequence of the doctrine of psychophysical parallelism, according to which "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of causes" (see 2p7). According to 2p21, this "idea of the Mind is united to the Mind in the same way as the Mind is united to the Body". In 2p21s, Spinoza explains this view with the help of 2p7s, according to which "the idea of the Body and the Body, i.e. (by p13), the Mind and the Body, are one and the same Individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension". Does Spinoza want this idea of identity to apply to the relation between ideas and ideas of ideas as well? Consider the passage at 2p21s, where Spinoza makes the transition from the structure of the Divine mind to the experience of thinking human beings:

So the idea of the Mind and the Mind itself are the same thing, which is conceived under the same attribute, viz. Thought. The idea of the Mind, I say, and the Mind itself follow in God from the same power of thinking and by the same necessity. For the idea of the Mind, i.e., the idea of the idea, is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object. For as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the

same time knows that he knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity³⁹.

According to the literal interpretation defended by Sylvain Zac and Gilles Deleuze, Spinoza means what he says: ideas of ideas are the same ontological entities as the ideas they are said to be the ideas of – the only difference, a difference of perspective, being that ideas of ideas are the formal aspect of the ideas they are said to be ideas of. Thus Zac writes, “The idea does not precede the idea of an idea, neither chronologically, nor logically, nor ontologically”⁴⁰. More recently, this line of interpretation has come under criticism, especially in the work of Jonathan Bennett and Lee C. Rice. Bennett favors an interpretation according to which the idea of an idea is not identical to the form of an idea but rather *expresses* its form⁴¹. Rice puts it this way: “Spinoza is saying here that the idea of an idea of an object selects the intrinsic features of that object, but not its representative ones”⁴². Bennett identifies two problems for a literal interpretation, one textual, and one contextual. The first point concerns the last sentence of 2p21s: on first sight, this sentence seems to suggest that there are (infinitely) many different levels of knowing that one knows. Only in case ideas of ideas are in a substantive sense different from the ideas they are ideas of does it make sense to speak of an infinity of levels of awareness of thought.

39 All translations from the *Ethics* and the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* are those of Edwin Curley; see *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. E. Curley, vol. 1, Princeton 1985.

40 S. Zac: *L’idée de vie dans la philosophie de Spinoza*, Paris 1963, p. 125; see G. Deleuze: *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression*, Paris 1968, especially ch. 8.

41 Jonathan Bennett: *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, Indianapolis 1984, pp. 184-191.

42 Lee C. Rice: “Reflexive Ideas in Spinoza”, in: *Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990), pp. 201-211, at p. 207.

The second point concerns the thesis of psychophysical identity: as the form of an idea is identical to the form of a physical object, reflexive ideas on a one-level view would be nothing other than forms of physical objects. In this case, Bennett argues, it becomes unintelligible how they can function as what accounts for self-knowledge⁴³.

These objections notwithstanding, there are several features of Spinoza's metaphysics (and epistemology) that speak in favor of a one-level interpretation: an interpretation according to which reflection does not add something to the level of ideas but rather is an intrinsic feature of ideas themselves. Before looking at some passages from the *Ethics*, let us consider the theory of reflection in the earlier *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*. Already at this early stage (or at least in his afterthoughts on the text), Spinoza seems to advocate a one-level theory of self-knowledge and reflection. For example, in a note later added to the preface of the second part he writes:

This change in us, which results from other bodies acting upon us, cannot take place without the soul, which always changes correspondingly, becoming itself aware of the change. And this change is what we call feeling⁴⁴.

In his translation of the *Short Treatise*, Edwin Curley suggests that the last sentence be read as “And the [consciousness of this] change is what we call feeling”. Although Curley's addition lends a higher degree of intelligibility to this rather opaque passage, it nevertheless may distort what Spinoza has in mind. An alternative reading that possibly is closer to the intentions of Spinoza would be

43 Bennett: *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (see note 41), p. 187.

44 *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Part II, note 1 to the preface, sec. 13.

that at this place consciousness is not introduced as a second-level activity that has the change of bodily states as its object. Rather, feeling itself is characterised as the change of mental states that corresponds to the change of bodily states. Although this reading ascribes to Spinoza a less intuitively plausible theory of feeling than the one suggested by Curley, it seems to be favoured by what Spinoza actually says. Moreover, it seems to fit better into the context of the general ontological framework outlined in the *Short Treatise*. In particular, already at this stage Spinoza claims that the soul of a particular thing is nothing but its idea⁴⁵, and that ideas and extended things are only modes of the Divine substance⁴⁶. Thus, the *Short Treatise* already formulates a theory of psychophysical parallelism and comes close to endorsing a theory of psychophysical identity. This would allow Spinoza to characterise the change of the bodily states itself as feeling, without invoking any higher-order mental activities, which, in turn, would open the way to understand awareness as an intrinsic feature of feeling.

This reading is confirmed in two other passages from the *Short Treatise*. In a note to chapter 20 of the second part, Spinoza writes:

It is clear that in man, because he has a beginning, there is no other attribute than those that have been in nature before. And because man consists in such a body of which necessarily there has to be an idea in the thinking thing, and because this idea has necessarily has to be united with the body, we claim without hesitating that his soul is nothing else but the idea of this his body in the thinking thing. Now, because this body has motion and rest (which are proportioned and usually changed through external objects) and because no change can take place in the

45 *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Part II, note 1 to the preface, sec. 6.

46 *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Part II, note 1 to the preface, sec. 1-4.

object without this change taking place at the same time in the idea, from this it follows that human beings feel (*idea reflexiva*)⁴⁷.

Although Spinoza here explicitly connects the notion of feeling with the notion of reflection, there does not seem to be any talk of a higher-level mental activity. Quite to the contrary, the change of mental states is characterised as simultaneous with the change of bodily states. Reflexivity comes in through the claim that feeling consists in parallel changes in different modifications of Divine attributes. Similarly, in the Appendix to the *Short Treatise* Spinoza outlines a theory of feeling according to which there is a certain proportion of motion and rest in the body, the “objective essence” of which is the soul or idea of the body. When the proportion of motion and rest changes, the idea of the body changes correspondingly, and thereby feelings are produced⁴⁸. Spinoza concludes:

Finally, because we have now explained what feeling is, we can easily see how from this there arises a reflexive idea, or knowledge of oneself, experience, and reasoning. And from all of this (and also because our soul is united with God, and is a part of the infinite idea arising immediately from God) we can see clearly the origin of clear knowledge, and the immortality of the soul. But for the present what we have said will be enough⁴⁹.

This conclusion would be unintelligible on a higher-order interpretation of reflection and consciousness, because the preceding

47 *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Part II, ch. 20, note 4; “*idea reflexiva*” Latin in the original text.

48 *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Appendix, “Of the Human Soul”, sec. 13-16.

49 *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Appendix, “Of the Human Soul”, sec. 17.

theory of feeling does not mention any higher-order mental activities. Of course, how an account of reflection, self-knowledge and reasoning simply follows from the theory of feeling outlined in the preceding sections may not be as self-evident as Spinoza has thought it to be. However, the claim that it can be easily seen how reflection, self-knowledge, experience and reasoning arise from feeling suggests that reflection, self-knowledge and reasoning are seen as something that is already inherent in the first-order activity of feeling.

Although the terminology used in 2p20 and 2p21 on first sight suggests a higher-level interpretation, there also is internal evidence in the *Ethics* that favours a one-level interpretation. According to 2p22, the “human Mind perceives not only the affections of the Body, but also the ideas of these affections”. This is immediately qualified by 2p23: “Mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the Body”. If the mind is the idea of the body, it consists of the idea of bodily states, and if reflexivity is an intrinsic feature of these ideas, then it naturally follows that the mind is aware of itself only by means of an awareness of its bodily states. This corresponds to what Spinoza says in 2p23d: “the ideas of the affections by which the Body is affected involve the nature of the human Body itself (by p16), i.e. (by p13), agree with the nature of the Mind. Therefore, knowledge of these ideas will necessarily involve knowledge of the Mind. But (by p22) knowledge of these ideas is in the human Mind itself”. Again, in 3p9d, Spinoza says that “the mind (according to 2p23) is necessarily conscious of itself through the ideas of the affections of the body”. This doctrine becomes unintelligible on the contrary assumption that ideas are ideas that have ideas as objects – in this case, reflexive ideas would amount to an awareness of the affections of the mind. By contrast, a one-level theory of reflection would explain most

naturally one of the basic thoughts of Spinoza's ontology: Ideas of ideas behave to ideas as ideas behave to the body.

This implies that the causes and effects of an idea of an idea are the same as the causes and effects of the idea. For Spinoza, ideas of ideas therefore cannot add to the causal structure of the world. The identity of the causal roles of ideas and ideas of ideas would find a straightforward explanation on a literal reading of the thesis that ideas and ideas of ideas are the same entity seen under different perspectives. This would also explain why Spinoza thinks that the awareness of a thought always arises simultaneously with the thought itself: the awareness of thought is not a mental act in addition to the thought but a characteristic intrinsic to it. This would suggest a reading of 2p21s according to which there is not an infinity of levels of mental acts but only an infinity of levels of formal properties of thoughts. In this case, different levels of self-awareness could be described by means of formal concepts that themselves fall under formal concepts of a higher level.

This leaves us with Bennett's problem of the identity of an idea of an idea with the formal aspect of a physical object (the human body). It is true that, seen independently from Spinoza's theory of mind, the view that reflexive ideas are forms of human bodies looks counterintuitive. However, seen from within the system of Spinoza's metaphysics, this should not be regarded as a problem. If minds are bodies, then the formal aspects of minds are formal aspects of bodies. This would fit well with Spinoza's claims that the mind is aware of itself only through the affections of its body. It also would correspond to his suggestion that reflexive ideas can be characterised as formal aspects of ideas. Moreover, if the formal aspects of bodies are analysed in terms of "proportions" and their change, the claim of the *Short Treatise* that feelings are identical with the change of bodily proportions leads naturally to an explanation of how the

formal aspects of the mind and the formal aspects of the body can be identical. Thus, Bennett's worries appear to dissolve. On a one-level-interpretation, the way human bodies are organised has to account for the nature of feeling and the origin of self-awareness. However, this is exactly what one would expect from the standpoint of Spinoza's theory of psychophysical identity.

5. Leibniz's Response to Spinoza's Theory of Reflection

Leibniz seems to have felt the interpretative dilemma resulting from the divergence between the higher-level terminology of *Ethics* 2p20 and 2p21 and the one-level theory of causal roles in *Ethics* 2p22 and 2p23. In his reading notes, he remarks on 2p20: "Thus there are ideas of ideas. From this it would follow that this goes to infinity, if the human mind is an idea"⁵⁰. On 2p21s he comments: "From this it follows that in order to understand the idea of the body or the mind there would be no need for another idea"⁵¹. On 2p22 he writes: "If the mind perceives itself, how does it possibly follow that in God there is no idea of the mind other than the mind itself, because it perceives itself insofar as God expresses the perceiving mind"⁵². Finally, he objects to 2p23: "Rather, as God or the mind knows the body through the ideas of the affections of the body, [God or the mind] knows through the ideas of the affections of the mind"⁵³. Leibniz seems to have been sensitive to the problem that if ideas of ideas are related in the same way to ideas as ideas are to the body, then there cannot be any higher-order activity in the mind. To

50 A VI, 4, 1716.

51 A VI, 4, 1717.

52 A VI, 4, 1717.

53 A VI, 4, 1717.

this account of the nature of reflexive ideas, he opposes his own analysis of reflection, which sees reflection not as a perception of the affections of the body but as perceptions of the affections of the mind.

This explains why Leibniz's view of mental activity and persistence differs substantially from Spinoza's. According to Spinoza, ideas of ideas cannot have a causal role over and above that of the ideas they are said to be ideas of, because they arise simultaneously with these ideas, which in turn is a consequence of a theory of psychophysical parallelism rooted in a theory of psychophysical identity. The only notion of mental activity and passivity Spinoza is able to provide is in terms of adequate and inadequate ideas. Ideas that are adequately in the mind are adequately in God insofar as God constitutes the essence of the mind, ideas that are inadequately in the mind are adequately in God insofar as God comprises all other minds within himself. Only in case an effect is caused by an idea that is adequately in the mind, can the mind be called an adequate cause of this effect; in this case, the mind is active, whereas in the case of inadequate ideas it is passive (3p1d). Whereas for Spinoza mental states are active only in the sense that they are adequate expressions of their effects, Leibniz's analysis of reflection adds to this the notion of immanent mental causation. For Leibniz, reflexive acts have a causal role in addition to the mental states they are about due to the diachronic structure of reflexive acts. Thus, there is a well-defined sense in which minds can be said to be active, whereas ideas cannot. This difference in the conception of mental activity shows itself again in diverging conceptions of the persistence of minds. According to Spinoza, minds endure for an indefinite duration, but they endure in the way causal chains of clear and confused ideas are continued. Because the essence of the mind consists in adequate and inadequate ideas (3p3), and the essence of a

thing is nothing but its striving to persist in its being (3p7), the mind strives to persist insofar as it has adequate and inadequate ideas (3p9). Moreover, because the mind is conscious of itself through the ideas of the affections of the body, it is conscious of this striving (3p9d). As in the case of mental activity and passivity, consciousness does not play a role for the persistence of the mind over and above that of adequate and inadequate ideas. By contrast, Leibniz's analysis of reflection leads to the notion of the mind as a thing that endures over time as long as it performs reflexive acts on its own activities. Thus, the analysis of reflection provides Leibniz not only with a notion of activity but also with a notion of persistence that diverges significantly from Spinoza's: Leibniz's notion of persistence is stronger than Spinoza's because it involves the persistence of individual things that, due to their immanent activity, are more than causal chains of adequate and inadequate ideas⁵⁴.

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